

**ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW
#301**

**REUBEN HANFORD HANSON
EWA MARINE CORPS AIR STATION, SURVIVOR**

**INTERVIEWED ON
DECEMBER 8, 1998
BY DANIEL MARTINEZ**

TRANSCRIBED BY:

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**USS ARIZONA MEMORIAL
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION**

Daniel Martinez (DM): The following oral history interview was conducted by Daniel Martinez, historian for the National Park Service at the USS *Arizona* Memorial. It was taped at the Imperial Palace Hotel in Las Vegas, Nevada on December 8, 1998 at approximately three p.m. in the afternoon. The person being interviewed is Reuben [Hanford] Hanson, who was a Marine at Ewa Marine Corps Air Station on December 7, 1941. For the record, Reuben, would you mind stating your full and complete name?

Reuben Hanford Hanson (RH): Reuben Hanford Hanson.

DM: And where were you born and what was the date?

RH: I was born in Northland, Wisconsin, March 3, 1916.

DM: And how many kids were in your family?

RH: There was four of us in my family.

DM: How many brothers and sisters?

RH: I had one brother and two sisters.

DM: And where were you in all of that?

RH: I was the oldest.

DM: Yeah, me too. That has its own liabilities. Your mom and dad, were they together during your raising as a child?

RH: Oh yes, yes. They were.

DM: What'd your father do for a living?

RH: My father was a contractor and builder and part-time farmer, you know. These are the depression years when you did a lot of different things.

DM: Now, what did you consider your hometown?

RH: Well, my hometown was Rhinelander.

DM: Rhinelander?

RH: Which is in the northern part of Wisconsin.

DM: Okay. Cold?

RH: Very cold. Very cold.

DM: Yeah. Your mother, was she a homemaker or did she...

RH: Yes. Very much so.

DM: And you lived on a farm?

RH: Well, part-time.

DM: Okay.

RH: We, my dad took over and ran a farm for a couple of years during a lull in contracting work. So that was during my high school years.

DM: Okay. And during high school, what was your favorite subjects? Did you have one?

RH: History.

DM: History.

RH: Mm-hmm.

DM: Little did you know you'd make history later on.

RH: (Chuckles) No, I didn't.

DM: And did you play sports?

RH: Yes, I played football for three years. And I was...

DM: And you're a fairly substantial guy. How tall are you?

RH: I'm six foot.

DM: That was a pretty good size in those days.

RH: Yes and then in high school I weighed 180 pounds, so I was a pretty heavy blocker. (Chuckles)

DM: And what position did you play?

RH: I played right tackle.

DM: Boy, I bet...

RH: And right guard.

DM: I bet some defensive ends really hated to see you come their way.

RH: Yeah, it was great.

DM: Enjoyed that?

RH: I enjoyed it very much.

DM: Now you successfully completed high school?

RH: Oh yes. Uh-huh.

DM: And then after high school, what was life?

RH: After high school, I went to University of Wisconsin for a year and a half.

DM: Did you play football there?

RH: No, I did not. I was lucky to just survive. (Chuckles)

DM: Now, you went for a year and a half and what interrupted your education?

RH: Well, it was mostly the hard times. You couldn't find work. You know, this was in 1934.

DM: Right.

RH: And even though the tuition was almost minimal...

DM: Right.

RH: ...you still had to live, you know, while you were down there. So that's when I got interested in the Marine Corps.

DM: Did you...

RH: Primarily to afford an education and have an opportunity maybe to go to further school.

DM: Why did you choose the Marine Corps?

RH: Well, it was funny. My cousin had gone to navy training at Great Lakes and he came home on boot leave, they called it. So I got to discussing with him about the navy. Well, I didn't

particularly want to spend my time out at sea, so that's why I took the alternate of the Marine Corps.

DM: And where did you enlist at?

RH: I enlisted at Chicago, Illinois.

DM: And once you enlisted, where did they send you?

RH: They sent me to San Diego.

DM: By train?

RH: By train.

DM: And then so you went into boot camp?

RH: Went into boot camp and spent the five weeks in boot training there, at the old Marine Corps recruit depot, which is no longer in use.

DM: Right. Now, what was the worst thing about boot camp?

RH: Well, always the worst thing is the discipline. When your sergeant can wake you up at two in the morning and have you stand at attention and things like that, you know.

DM: Do you remember your drill sergeant?

RH: I remember him personally, but I, you know, how he looked and everything. I can't remember his name exactly. I have a picture, at home but...

DM: Uh-huh.

RH: ...of my platoon.

DM: And how many guys were in your platoon?

RH: Oh, there was about fifty, I think, in round numbers.

DM: What did you like most about boot camp?

RH: Well, I always liked the drilling. In fact, I had taken two years of CMTC training, Citizens Military Training, when I was in high school.

DM: Right.

RH: And I went out to Fort Snelling, Minnesota for a month, two summers in a row. And I got into the drill.

DM: And you liked that?

RH: Yeah, and I liked that. And I always got in the position of right guide (chuckles).

DM: Okay. So you knew your right from your left.

RH: I did. And it helped a lot when I got into boot camp, you know.

DM: When you got out of boot camp, what was your assignment?

RH: My first assignment was over to the North Island with Marine Corps aviation, a base air detachment of Marine aviation.

DM: How were you selected for that?

RH: Well, they sent a major from the base over to interview the recruits and they all went up, they all wanted to go to aviation and they selected ten of us.

DM: Uh-huh, and you were fortunate to be one of them?

RH: I was fortunate to get over there.

DM: And so you go over there and what kind of training do you go through?

RH: Well, first thing I did, they interviewed us and find out what our background was. And they assigned me to machine shop.

DM: Okay.

RH: Which turned out to be beautiful. I was a machinist then all during that time and...

DM: What kind of things would you work on as a machinist?

RH: Well, we worked on turning out parts which weren't readily available in overhauling the aircraft. We had two of our planes that were Admiral Byrd took down to the South Pole.

DM: Really?

RH: And they were parked on the tarmac and we were working day and night to fixing a lot of things on [*them*]. We had—if they had broke a bolt, we the machinists would have to go out and drill that bolt out, you know, and rethread it and a lot of things like that. So...

DM: So the guys that were machinists, especially aviation, had to be very precise.

RH: Oh yes.

DM: And were very sharp in measuring and doing the kind of tolerances that are necessary in aircraft.

RH: Yeah. That's why I was selected then later to go to Hawaii with the group that went out there. But my sergeant that was the NCO in charge, he, once I proved myself, why he wouldn't let me go. He...

DM: He wanted you there, right?

RH: Yeah, he kept me there all the time until he had no choice but letting me go for the detachment that went to Hawaii.

DM: What makes a good machinist, do you think?

RH: Well, I would think, of course, the love of precision. I mean it takes a lot of patience. It's just like a tool and dye maker. You have to use a lot of common sense and ingenuity to get things to work right.

DM: Right.

RH: And it isn't all in books and it isn't all that somebody else can show you, you know. You have to work it out yourself.

DM: Now, Marine Corps aviation, what was its status before the war?

RH: Well, we had two Marine Corps aviation units. One there at North Island and one in Quantico, Virginia. And that was the extent of aviation. The total strength of the Marine Corps, at that time, was 17,000 men.

DM: Okay.

RH: And...

DM: And out of that pie, how much of it was aviation?

RH: Out of that pot, probably about, I would say, probably 500 to 800 men.

DM: So is it safe to say that Marine aviation was pretty elite?

RH: And it was small! (Chuckles)

DM: I've heard stories, and maybe you can confirm this, that the Marine Corps aviation, at that time, got the hand-me-downs from the navy. Is that true?

RH: Very true. Very true. Yes. We had the old gloss wing planes all the time until it was about 1938, '39, in that era, that we got our first metal aircraft, which was a Douglass Marauder.

DM: Uh-huh.

RH: That dive-bomber.

DM: Right.

RH: Other than that, we were playing the old 2U's, the old cloth-covered wings and in fact we had a fabric shop that would re-cover the wings and re-cover the fuselage with fabric.

DM: While the navy had all the up-to-date metal winged aircraft and...

RH: Well, they didn't have it much earlier than we did.

DM: Okay.

RH: I will say that they gave us nothing. It was...

DM: But Marine...

RH: ...we'll take two, we'll give you one, you know.

DM: Aviation itself was struggling during those years because of appropriations and...

RH: Yes, oh yes.

DM: And then there was a great question among strategists about the value of air.

RH: Yes.

DM: Even though it had proven itself in World War I, there was this still this whole...

RH: Yeah.

DM: ...discussion happening, right.

RH: Well, we still had pilots, at that time, in our organization that had flown in Nicaragua during the rebellion down there.

DM: Maybe even Mexico too.

RH: And they were the first pilots that, you know, that were used in combat.

DM: Amazing.

RH: They'd carry a bomb over the side and drop it!

DM: Now that's precision bombing. But I guess in retrospect, this was the beginning of Marine aviation and its most earnest time, but it would certainly prove itself during World War II.

RH: Oh yes, yes. And it grew so rapidly when the war—of course we had nothing when we went out to Hawaii but shortly

after that it started to build up. We had our squadrons back, replaced.

DM: Well, let's talk about Hawaii. How long were you in to get transferred?

RH: Well, I went out there, of course, in January of '41.

DM: How old were you then?

RH: How old? Twenty-five.

DM: So you were a mature guy by that time.

RH: Oh yes, yeah.

DM: Yeah.

RH: I had been in and...

DM: What was your ranking?

RH: And I had been married.

DM: Oh, you were married?

RH: I was a sergeant when we went out there, but things went so fast, I was a staff sergeant right away.

DM: Is that right?

RH: And then I became a tech sergeant. And I was assistant NCO in charge of the machine shop, the metal shop.

DM: There at Ewa?

RH: At Ewa, yes.

DM: When did you—I'm sorry, when did you say you went to Hawaii? What year was that?

RH: January of '41.

DM: January of '41. So just about a year...

RH: Just about a year.

DM: ...before the attack on Pearl Harbor. Describe to me Ewa Marine Corps Air Station. What did it look like when you got there?

RH: Well, when we got there, it was a small facility with a tower. And it turned out, this was a tower that had been erected by the navy to eventually handle dirigibles. It was an old...

DM: Airships.

RH: ...airship tower. And we were going out there on a strictly expeditionary duty to set up and a new kind of training capacity for our planes to operate. And we had two squadrons of fighter planes and two of dive-bombers.

DM: Okay.

RH: Then of course the assorted utility planes came with that.

DM: How many planes were in a squadron?

RH: Well, about twenty-four.

DM: Okay.

RH: And...

DM: And there was deluxe facilities there?

RH: Yeah. We had nothing. It was just a bare strip of about, concrete macadam and they set up their lines along the edge of the runways there.

DM: Uh-huh.

RH: And then we had to build all our own, you know, facilities.

DM: Facilities.

RH: We built up tents. We had tents all with the wooden floors.

DM: Right.

RH: And that was our housing.

DM: Now I understand that out on the Ewa plain it's quite dusty and hot.

RH: Oh yes. It was right out in the boonies, you know, I think, to use the term out there.

DM: In fact, cactus grows out there.

RH: Yeah.

DM: Is it true that there were scorpions and...

RH: Oh sure. Sure.

DM: Nasty little critters like that? Now, were you sure you were in Hawaii?

RH: (Laughs) It was kind of a rough spot, I tell you.

DM: But the Marines wouldn't have it any other way, right.

RH: No, that's right.

DM: So...

RH: We made a nice space out of it later.

DM: Right. The buildup, obviously, was now growing. What was the mission of the Ewa Marine Corps Air Station as it related to Pearl Harbor and its defenses?

RH: Well, it was, of course, our fighter planes was to operate off the carriers. They were, all of our pilots were carrier qualified.

DM: Okay.

RH: And they would work in and out with the navy. As the carriers would go out to sea, why they would join them. Our utility planes, of course, were used as supply.

DM: Right.

RH: To supply, probably, if we had a front line troops and so forth.

DM: Right.

RH: It was all pretty much in a preliminary stage at that time, you know, the training, its mission and everything.

DM: How about the dive-bombers? What were their role?

RH: Well, they also went aboard the carriers.

DM: Okay.

RH: Yeah. The SBD's we'd call 'em.

DM: Now, how did you decide which carriers you were going to?
Was that all worked out...

RH: Well, that was all done on a higher level.

DM: Right.

RH: The navy decided along with the Marine commandant, you know, who should be. This all kind of evolved too as we went further into the war in the Battle of Midway, which the Marines were heavily involved in.

DM: Right. Not only on carriers, but at Midway itself.

RH: Yeah, those that were on Midway itself.

DM: Now, you arrive in January 1941. You're working out, building this base and such and the tensions in the Pacific are steadily increasing.

RH: Mm-hmm.

DM: And by November of 1941, there has been a big alert. Were you involved in that alert, of late November, which was the army's anti-sabotage alert? Did you guys react to alerts?

RH: No. No. Not really. We had no inkling of any sabotage or any alert at all. We, there was a number of maneuvers going on in the island.

DM: Right.

RH: The army would have maneuvers and but we were not really involved too much. We'd go on with our own mission, you know.

DM: Right. Now, is it safe to say that communication between the army and the navy and the Marine corps—and I'm putting the navy and the Marine corps together—at best was not the greatest out there.

RH: I don't think it was, no, in my opinion, because we didn't get fed too much information.

DM: And yet you were an air station that was vital...

RH: Yeah.

DM: ...perhaps to the defense of the island.

RH: Yeah.

DM: The events started to really get tense by December of 1941. Was there any illusion among the pilots and the people you work with that the potential adversary out here probably would be the Japanese?

RH: I don't know that there was any apprehension on the part of anybody that we were going to be attacked. I keep hearing, as time went by you know, that there was this apprehension, but I don't recall seeing it myself. 'Cause everybody was relaxed. Most of the officers lived ashore. They had apartments in Honolulu, those that weren't married, you know, had single quarters.

DM: Right.

RH: And even I had my wife come out in July of that year and we found a small house to live in, in Pearl City.

DM: Oh you didn't live in Ewa Plantation, you lived in Pearl City?

RH: I lived personally off the base, yes.

DM: Okay.

RH: After July, after she came out.

DM: Okay. And...

RH: Which was highly permissible. If it had been any inkling of any problems, of course they would have...

DM: Danger.

RH: ...stopped liberty like that immediately.

DM: Now, how long did it take you to drive out from Pearl City to Ewa.

RH: Oh, about twenty minutes, probably.

DM: How were the roads going out there?

RH: Just little narrow macadam roads. (Chuckles) Going through the city, Waipahu?

DM: Right.

RH: And into Ewa?

DM: Past the sugar cane plant and all that?

RH: Yeah.

DM: Let me take you to the weekend of December 7 and what was Saturday night like for you?

RH: Well, Saturday night, we had been over to Hickam Field to a dinner with a girl and her husband. He was a captain in the [Army] Air [Corps]. And we'd been over there because she had met this girl on the ship coming over.

DM: And what ship was that?

RH: She came over on the [SS] *Lurline*.

DM: Okay, a Matson liner.

RH: Matson liner, yeah. And but this girl, they got to be good friends, so we went over there for dinner. Well, in coming back, I—my wife always brings this story up—in driving back, we came on the Aiea highway, which to mean, Honolulu, you know, past Pearl City.

DM: Right.

RH: And it takes a rise up there and you get a pretty good view of the whole harbor of Pearl and I made the remark to my wife. I says, "My gosh, look at that. Here every battleship is lined up. All the ships are in there. What a beautiful spot for somebody to hit us."

I mean, completely innocent of any indication that this would ever happen!

DM: But your assessment was as a naval aviator and looking at it as a target-rich environment.

RH: Yeah, I mean, how could this happen? How could you have every one of your major ships in the harbor, lined up in neat rows, lit up like Christmas trees? They all had their lights

going up, you know, on all, every one of the yardarms going up, you know, to the towers.

DM: Quite beautiful.

RH: Beautiful to look at.

DM: But then the other way, your comment was based as a military man.

RH: That's right. I just couldn't believe.

DM: What'd your wife say?

RH: She says, "I don't know. It is pretty," she say, "but I can see what you mean, you know."

No, she brings that story up many times, but you know, it had no impact, really. It was just conversation between us.

DM: Now, on the morning of December 7, were you at home in Pearl City?

RH: I was at home. In fact, I had, I was about to get up and haul some garbage to the dump.

DM: Uh-huh.

RH: I had a little Buick Roadster that I had picked up to travel and transportation.

DM: What year was it?

RH: It was a 1929, a beautiful little car. (Chuckles)

DM: What color? Do you remember?

RH: _____ jet black.

DM: Jet black.

RH: With brown upholstery and rumble seat, wings on the windshield.

DM: Sounds like a hot car.

RH: It would be a mint car if I could have hung on to it, you know.

DM: So from where your home was, could you see Pearl Harbor from there?

RH: Not exactly, no. There was too many trees and houses. But what happened was that we started hearing all of these explosions and the machine gun fire.

DM: Was it distant or was it loud?

RH: It was in a little distant and so we looked out the window and we could see black smoke and everything. And so we thought, well, maybe the army is having a realistic maneuver or something, you know. So we immediately turned on the radio. Well, the radio was dead because when the attack first was imminent there, when the planes approached Honolulu, the radio stations went off the air, particularly to avoid creating a homing base for the Japanese planes. So we had no communications of any kind.

So I says, "Well, we better see what's happening."

So we jumped in the car. There was four of us that—I had another sergeant living with us and his wife. So we ran down to the beach at Pearl City, which is not very far. But

directly across from Ford Island, you know, the open space of water and there's Ford Island. You can see it.

DM: Sure.

RH: But you can't see where the battleships were, because they were on the opposite side of the island.

DM: They're on the east side of Ford Island.

RH: Right. But what we could see was absolute devastation. I seen two or three PBY's burning on the ramp there at Ford Island.

DM: Right.

RH: I seen a ship turn over.

DM: The *Utah*?

RH: Completely turn over. One of the smaller military ships that we had there. And that was, as I got the story later, it was just shortly down the road where they got that Japanese miniature sub.

DM: Right.

RH: So of course this other guy and I, this sergeant, our main thought you know, this was, we should be at our base right away, you know, soon.

DM: Did you realize it was a Japanese attack?

RH: Oh yes. Well, what happened was we turned around and ran back to the house, 'cause we had to drop the girls off.

DM: Uh-huh.

RH: And we wanted the girls to stay in the house until they were evacuated. We knew that the army MPs would have that chore. As we approached our house, here comes a Japanese Betty, and he wasn't more than 500 feet in elevation. He was heading right for Pearl, or for Ford Island.

DM: Uh-huh.

RH: And I could see the big yellow ball and there was a rear seat gunner was spraying lead all over.

DM: You mean the red ball?

RH: The red ball. Yeah.

DM: Right.

RH: What did I say, yellow?

DM: Yeah, yellow.

RH: It was yellow...

DM: _____ maybe other things were going on.

RH: Yellow guys, yeah. But anyway, he kept spraying this lead and I told the gals, you know, we all kind of took a little cover there.

DM: Was he shooting at you guys?

RH: Well, he was spraying all over, with no discrimination.

DM: Was it the rear gunner that was doing that?

RH: Rear seat gunner. He had a machine gun on a swivel.

DM: Okay.

RH: And I could see him as plain as the day.

DM: Now did this plane have fixed gear? Was that one of the dive-bombers?

RH: It was a Betty, yeah. It was...

DM: Well, there was—excuse me for correcting—there was Vals, Kates and Zeroes, and those were the planes on the mission, but I can help you—did it have fixed gear?

RH: Yeah, fixed gear.

DM: So it was a Val, it was a dive bomber.

RH: Oh yeah.

DM: Okay.

RH: And he had a two-seater.

DM: Right, exactly.

RH: Yeah. Well, anyway, it turned out that this was no question in our mind then as to what was happening. And in fact, we got three, four big bullets come down through the ceiling of our house and went right down through the floor.

DM: You're kidding.

RH: Yeah. And I went down underneath the house and retrieved some...

DM: Do you still have those?

RH: Fifty caliber. I don't have them any more, no.

DM: Oh.

RH: I don't know what happened to them. They're probably in a box somewhere. But that didn't leave any question as to what was happening, so we immediately told the girls to stay. We jumped in the car and headed for, got on the highway, headed out to Ewa.

DM: Now that must have been some drive.

RH: Oh boy. And as we were going, we seen two Jap planes on fire crash into the cane field, right off, a few hundred yards off to the highway.

DM: Wow.

RH: And this was documented, you know, later, that there was a few of their airplanes were gotten any way.

DM: Right.

RH: So as soon as we got within short distance of our base, we were stopped. Here was a bunch of guys in full battle gear out there who were stopping everybody. So of course we were identified and...

DM: Were you in civilian dress at that time? Or did you put your uniforms on?

RH: I think we put our khaki on, yeah.

DM: All right. And who were these guys stopping you?

RH: Well, some of our own men.

DM: Okay.

RH: That had been recruited, you know. They picked up some rifles and—'cause normally, in aviation, you weren't even armed with rifles.

DM: Right.

RH: And you were lucky if you were on guard or something to have a forty-five. It's usually you were armed with a billy club, you know.

DM: Right.

RH: This is peacetime.

DM: Right.

RH: So after stopping us for a minute and identifying us, they let us go through. So we got onto the base then right away.

DM: And what'd you see?

RH: Well, devastation. All of our planes were burning. And guys were running all over, looking for cover, you know. They had started a swimming pool...

DM: Uh-huh.

RH: ...on the base and that's where a lot of the guys took cover, in that area. But anyway, the Sergeant Murphy that was with me, that had lived with us or was living with us, he was a supply sergeant, so he took off for his area and I took off for mine, which was the shop area.

DM: And how'd the shop do?

RH: Well, not too bad. They didn't—this was one unique thing, I think, about being hit by a force like that. Now, they had a turkey shoot. All they had to do was line up with our planes, open their guns and go right down the row of 'em and hit our [*planes with*] incendiary bullets, and every plane blew up. They didn't care about tents, quarters or anything like that. They had one mission. And they did a tremendous job.

DM: Uh-huh.

RH: Because as they could see all the planes in one row burning, they just go to another row.

DM: Okay. We've got two minutes, that's about all...

RH: Oh...

DM: But keep going.

RH: Anyway, I dashed into a supply tent and got a couple guys to help me and we drug out a box with thirty-caliber water-cooled machine guns.

DM: Right.

RH: It was all Cosmoline. We got gasoline and then we spent about an hour cleaning this thing up, putting it together.

DM: Uh-huh.

RH: Well here we had a working machine gun, but we had to get ammo. So we got four or five cases of ammo and we went across the field, the end of the field was—on the other side was all coral.

DM: Okay.

RH: You see, in our minds, we were thinking, what are these guys going to do? Are they sending an attack force and...

DM: You were thinking of maybe invasion?

RH: We were going to do all we could, yeah, to set up some kind of a resistance.

DM: Uh-huh.

RH: So we got a, found a fairly good little revetment to set up the machine gun and we were probably 200 yards from the beach.

DM: Okay.

RH: And we got, we made many trips hauling these cases of ammo out there and we sat then the rest of the afternoon, pushing bullets into this web belt. You know you have to have it in a web belt to feed through the machine gun.

DM: Sure.

RH: So we pushed it on a rock. We pushed the belt in and pushed it on a rock and we loaded four boxes of ammunition that way. And during that time, I would take breaks and go back to the main side because our old planes, there's nothing we could do. They were all burning.

DM: They were all gone.

RH: Gone.

DM: And the raid was over?

RH: Yeah. The attack was essentially, had their last attack had gone over.

DM: When you got there, was the attack still going on?

RH: Oh yes. Yeah. They were still hitting down. In fact, one thing I feel memorable to my mind was that I seen Captain Welch, you know, the only guy that got in a P-40 off of that grass field...

DM: Uh-huh.

RH: ...to hit the Japanese. He was on the tail of one of the Japanese as they came right over our base.

DM: Is that right? The dogfight was going on?

RH: Yeah.

DM: 'Cause [*Second*] Lieutenants Taylor and Welch were credited with...

RH: Welch.

DM: ...bagging some planes.

RH: That's right.

DM: And so you saw that.

RH: I saw that. And he was right on their tail.

DM: And put some rounds in her.

RH: And only those two 40's, two P-40's got in the air.

DM: Yeah. There was more, but in that area, that's...

RH: In that area, yeah.

DM: ...that sector, they were doing it. And you saw the dogfight?

RH: Yeah.

DM: How did our boys do?

RH: Oh god, we cheered them. It was just...

DM: Oh, you guys were cheering and everything?

RH: Oh sure. We could see this, you know.

DM: And so when one of the Japanese planes started smoking and all that, you guys, it was like a...

RH: Yeah. Of course, they were quite a ways off and by that time, they were making this big swoop like this.

DM: So you're watching and the Marines are cheering these...

RH: Yeah.

DM: ...eight army aviators, huh.

RH: Oh sure.

DM: It's like a football game.

RH: Yeah. And if we could have just gotten some of our planes in the air, you know, it would have been such a different story.

DM: But you couldn't, they were all gone.

RH: All gone.

DM: Let me ask you about an incident—okay.

END OF TAPE #40

TAPE #41

RH: ...it was, yeah.

DM: Okay. Tell me when we're up to speed.

(Conversation off-mike)

DM: Okay. One of the incidents that has grown in more attention—I've been doing a lot of research. Some of the Ewa Marines have been assisting in that research. And it's one of the more interesting angles of the Pearl Harbor attack. And that has to do with a certain Private [William Edward] Lutschan [Jr., USMCR]. Are you aware of Private Lutschan and what is your take on this?

RH: Well...

DM: And tell me the facts as you know them.

RH: Well, I might say that I knew—well, he was a sergeant by that time.

DM: Okay.

RH: And he was a truck driver. And I knew Sergeant Lutschan very well. I knew him very well because he used to drive Murphy, the sergeant that lived with me, he used to drive him into Honolulu repeatedly for supplies, and they'd stop at the house, you know. Either I was there or I wasn't there,

but they would stop. So I got to know him quite well. And I had no, you know, no feelings about him one way or another.

DM: What kind of guy was he?

RH: He was quite a quiet individual. Kind of unassuming. He kind of sit in the corner most of the time. Never say much of anything. But as I mentioned before, when we were sitting out there in the boondocks, loading ammunition and everything. Of course, hunger was getting to us, so we'd take turns leading that and going to the base. And we'd go to the mess hall and where they all had made up a bunch of sandwiches and everything, and that's about all we ever got to eat during that period.

And during one of my, when I got back there, I seen a group of guys congregating right in front of the dispensary, which was right near the entrance to the mess hall.

DM: Right.

RH: And here was this pickup with a body across the back. And Jesus, what's happened, you know. I thought it was an accident or something. Well, the very—you know, the anger and the frustration in everybody's mind, it was just fantastic. That to think that we would lose all our planes and then to be attacked by that and surprised, I mean, you'd kick a dead dog, you know. It's just something boiling up. So what happened was they took this body and rolled him off onto the ground and rolled him over. And they didn't touch him after that, but, "What in the heck is going on?"

And well, right away, they said, "Well, this is a Nazi spy."

I said, "Nazi spy in our outfit?"

"Well, that's the word we got, you know, that among all the fellows."

So this is—they, you know, rolled him up in some tarp and took him into the dispensary. So I walked up to the main gate and there was a sergeant, a guard that was an old friend of mine, Pop Fuller. And I says, "Pop, what in the world is going on?"

He says, "Well," he says, "short time ago," he said, "we got a call from Honolulu that we should pick up Lutschan and hold him until somebody came and picked him up. They didn't tell us why or anything, but..."

DM: Who'd the call come from?

RH: Well, they said the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation].

DM: Okay.

RH: And so then they had him in the guard shack, he was sitting there. Well then another, the final attack came over and this is while we were, I wasn't there at that time. I was out on the field. But during this confusion, everybody, you know, taking cover and planes strafing bullets all over the place, and so he slipped away. And he grabbed a rifle with him and he went down to a road which led down back towards Ewa, which is a short stretch, probably a hundred yards.

DM: Right.

RH: Where it met another highway going crossways, north-south. And so Pop immediately grabbed three or four guys and says, "Hey, we got to get this guy back. They want him held."

So they grabbed some weapons and they had seen him go down there and they went down. When they got near there, he heard this—he had crawled back into a culvert, under the highway, and he started taking shots at them. And they had to take cover. So one of the guys was a pretty good shot with a rifle, and so he crawled up in the tree, where he could get a look at, you know, a sight down towards him. And so he shot Lutschan at that time. And 'cause he wasn't about to give up or he wasn't going to surrender. So he ended his life right there. But that's the...

DM: What do you make of this story?

RH: Hmm?

DM: What do you make of this story?

RH: Well, as I heard later, he was a boy that was led around. His father, they said immediately in the story I got was that he was picked up in San Francisco as a German spy. They'd had Lutschan under surveillance apparently. And they'd pick up his mail and read it or decode it and so forth, as it was being sent back to San Francisco. And so it wasn't a surprise to the FBI when, you know, that he should be killed, I guess. Because nobody showed up that I know of. I never heard of anybody coming from Honolulu to look into it.

DM: But how could he rise to the rank of sergeant in the Marine Corps?

RH: Because he had no other, nothing to go on. There was no—he was a smart enough boy to be a truck driver and he had been in ordnance for a while. And he was an intelligent kid. He wasn't a dummy. And promotions were being handed out pretty readily at that particular time.

DM: Right. Do you think he was?

RH: Do what?

DM: Do you think he was a spy or an agent?

RH: I think he was.

DM: Or was this just a scared guy that, you know, they were rounding him up and he just freaked out?

RH: Well...

DM: And thought that—because understand—and I know you probably didn't witness this, but you may have heard stories—that there was an altercation before this apparently and I understand that they thought he took off with all the truck keys. I've heard a lot of different stories.

RH: Well, that might be that people that had other information...

DM: But it sounds to me, and excuse me for interrupting, but it sounds to me that the guy you relied on was Pop Fuller and it seems to me by the tone of your voice, that he was a guy you knew, you trusted, respected, and he gave you all he knew.

RH: Yeah.

DM: And he was there.

RH: He was there. And as I say, that's my—really the sole extent of my personal involvement with the situation. And the only reason I go on and give you hearsay is that that's the only way that it'll tie the whole thing together.

DM: I got you.

RH: I mean just to say that there's a body, do with it what you want to. I mean, to me, the fact that he was under custody and slipped away, and then not to surrender and give himself up, if he was an innocent kid.

DM: Right.

RH: But then to lay there and start firing back at the guys that were sent out to get him.

DM: Yeah.

RH: I mean, (chuckles)...

DM: How come this story never came out?

RH: Well, the media is supposed to service, let all these stories go out that have any...

DM: You think it just got...

RH: ...negative impact on the view of the organization, you know. And I suppose the Marine Corps must have had some feedback from the FBI that they had a potential or an actual spy in their midst. And this, you know, this happens all the time and you read in the books that they don't pick a guy up. What they do is they put him under surveillance and read all his coded information. This is the way they've broken a lot of spy outfits.

DM: Right.

RH: So that's about all you can read out of it, I know.

DM: Now, I have a photograph of two or three dead Marines inside a building. I don't know what the building is.

RH: Uh-huh.

DM: And one of them looks like Lutschan in there. And I'm wondering if I send you this picture, as distasteful as that might be...

RH: Yeah.

DM: ...could you look at that and see if you could identify him?

RH: I'd be very happy to look at it, yeah.

DM: I have that. Did you recognize when the body fell off the truck, when they rolled it down off the truck, that that was Lutschan?

RH: Yes. Oh yes.

DM: And then you said, "What in the hell is going on?"

RH: Yeah. I says, "Jesus," I couldn't believe that this was...

DM: He was still in uniform, right.

RH: Oh yes.

DM: Now these bodies...

RH: In fatigues, you know.

DM: Right. These bodies are in fatigues. They're in a building. Now you're, you kind of intimated that bodies were being put in a building there at the dispensary. This is a wooden frame building.

RH: Oh yeah, uh-huh. Well, they had one right adjacent to it, yeah.

DM: Okay, well I'm going to send you that photograph in January.

RH: I, as I say, I kind of lost touch with—I wasn't in medical or anything. I didn't have any reason to do any identification. Everybody knew him, you know...

DM: Right.

RH: ...in that outfit. We were all a small group. We worked close together on most everything. Transportation was with you, hauling things for you all the time and he's a truck driver. So there was no question in anybody's mind as to who it was. It was just a question, hard to believe that something like that would happen.

DM: And I guess that story has remained kind of unsolved, not talked about...

RH: In a sense, in a sense.

DM: ...since 1941. Now, I got involved with this story...

RH: Uh-huh.

DM: ...because one of the park rangers, a guy named Jack Henckels, had run across this story and we both talked about it. He had been doing some preliminary research. I had done some research 'cause this story came up in 1991 amongst the Ewa Marines at the, that I had met, during the fiftieth anniversary commemoration.

RH: Oh yeah, uh-huh.

DM: And there was sketchy details and confused details about this story. So I think that this story is one of those little Pearl Harbor mysteries when you really think about it.

RH: It's probably, yes. But...

DM: And what I'm thinking of doing is, I'm going to talk to the FBI about this story and see where that leads.

RH: They must have some kind of records on that.

DM: Have to.

RH: Now you know further than that is just last year, I think it was John Wright was out there.

DM: Right. I talked with John and John talked with Jack and I just have to get a hold of John. And so I'm going to call you. I need to revisit...

RH: Well, John got a hold of me, you know, looking for further collaboration...

DM: Right.

RH: ...of what happened on that day out at Pearl, December 7. And that's about all I can really add. I seen the incident of him being brought in, but how can you relate to anything else that's hearsay or...

DM: Right.

RH: ...possibilities and all this.

DM: Well, it does sound like a great—excuse the word, but murder mystery because, I mean, here we have a man in uniform.

RH: Yeah.

DM: A man that apparently was accused of being a spy. A man that broke from custody, fired on his own soldiers, fellow Marines. Was killed in that action. And where he lies buried, I'm going to have to talk to maybe Ray Emery and see if he knows what happened to the body. But there's a very unsettling feeling...

RH: Well, there's a big void as far as—and even a bigger void with us who were there, because they didn't tell us anything, you know, about what was happening to him.

DM: Do you know what happened to his body at all?

RH: That, only thing that John said that he found out he was buried up at the National Cemetery up at Diamond Head there. *[Note: He is referring to the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific at Punchbowl.]*

DM: Oh...

RH: Or in the...

DM: Punchbowl actually. Probably buried at Halawa then moved up later when the opened Punchbowl.

RH: Yeah, yeah.

DM: That's very intriguing story. Now, just to wrap this particular thing up, not on the Lutschan, I think we've kind of exhausted that...

RH: Yeah.

DM: ...unless there's anything you have to add.

RH: There's much to add really.

DM: The feeling you mentioned of the Marines out there was one of just absolute anger.

RH: Oh yeah. I'll never forget in meeting, when I was in the process of working on the machine gun and all that, our colonel who was—he was in civilian clothes—showed up and he was standing on the edge of the runway. And he too made a remark. He says, "My god, my god," he says, "what happened?" He says, "Something like this should never, never have happened."

I mean, we were just like a bunch of innocent sheep out there, you know. If we'd had fifteen minutes, ten minutes warning, it would've been a whole different story. But the Japanese had everything their own way.

DM: And as you're aware, you at Ewa became one of the first targets hit.

RH: Yes.

DM: Because the main body came right over Makakilo area and swooped down. Are you aware there's movie footage of the Japanese approaching Ewa?

RH: Well, I was invited to the first showing of *Tora, Tora, Tora*...

DM: Uh-huh.

RH: ...which I think was a pretty good reproduction of the whole...

DM: Right. But there's actual movie footage taken from a Japanese plane...

RH: Oh.

DM: ...on the way in.

RH: No...

DM: I have a still from that and I'll share that with you. And you know, you can see the runway and it's all there. We have it in our movie...

RH: Oh...

DM: ...that we show now at Pearl Harbor, a small...

RH: Do you have a picture of it at the memorial you built there for it?

DM: Yes.

RH: I thought that...

DM: I put that in there in actuality.

RH: Yeah, I think that's under the glass there.

DM: But that's from a movie, that's a still from the movie that actually existed. You started cleaning up the mess, and of course...

RH: Oh yeah, we had to go back and forth. See the [Army] Air [Corps] didn't have any place either to land their planes. They wanted to bring them into our airstrip.

DM: Right.

RH: So we took carts and we'd sweep the runways, back and forth, walking behind them, you know, maybe about twenty men in a cart picking up...

DM: Wreckage?

RH: ...copper, I mean, casings.

DM: Uh-huh.

RH: Of shell casings off the runway that the Japanese had [*spent*] you know.

DM: You mean there was that many casings dropped?

RH: We had carts full of that stuff. Their runs, they went over...

DM: What happened to that stuff? What did you guys do with it?

RH: Oh well, it was salvaged, you know. They just probably turned it in for the brass that's in it, you know.

DM: Somebody remarked that the Japanese planes flew so low in strafing that they almost touched the ground there.

RH: Oh yeah. They come in awful low.

DM: So were you guys firing back at them with small arms fire and stuff?

RH: You gotta admit that they had everything going their own way.

DM: Yeah.

RH: When they found out there was no return fire, there was no embankments, there was—even the anti-aircraft. Like some of the anti-aircraft that fired off of the battlewagons...

DM: Right.

RH: ...the guys got to the guns and started firing.

DM: Right.

RH: We had three of those rounds land in our, right in our compound, because they...

DM: Friendly fire?

RH: ...didn't set the proximity fuses.

DM: So are you telling me on that day you got it from the Japanese and from our own forces?

RH: Right. (Laughs) But that was of course just a big mistake, you know, on their part. And in the confusion of the whole day, why so many little things like that happened.

DM: Sure. Obviously you went on to serve in the Marine Corps.

RH: Yes. I put in twenty years in the Marine Corps.

DM: Went and fought in the Pacific.

RH: Yes, all in the Pacific. I went from—well, as soon as we got organized after the attack, we formed a new air group.

DM: Right.

RH: Marine Air Group 21.

DM: Right.

RH: To go to Guadalcanal to make the first fight back against the Japanese and all the guys were just eager to get into this organization where we could get a shot back at those guys.

DM: So did you go to Henderson Field?

RH: I went to Henderson Field. I became master, tech sergeant and I was in charge of all the shops working on the planes, you know, on Henderson Field.

DM: And that was quite an action out there.

RH: Yeah, oh yeah.

DM: And from Henderson Field, where'd you go? What were some of the campaigns you were involved in?

RH: Well, I came back to the States then and I made warrant officer. Went back to Hawaii right away. I was at El Toro for a while. And then when I got there, why, we started equipping all of our planes to go to Midway and got involved in the Battle of Midway.

DM: Did you get out there or did you send your...

RH: I didn't go out there. I stayed—we were—I spent day and nights working on some of our planes, putting armor plate on the cockpits.

DM: Okay. To protect the pilots.

RH: Yeah. And these were some of our dive-bombers and so forth. Because that was auxiliary equipment. That didn't come out of the factory that way.

DM: Right.

RH: So that's that point of it and went through the Battle of Midway. And then, from there I went on out to Eniwetok. I was on the landing of Eniwetok...

DM: Okay.

RH: ...and we set up a base there at where we hit the Japanese at Majuro and all their other islands.

DM: Big battles.

RH: Yeah. And Truk, Ponape.

DM: And moved on up. And did you get into the Marianas as well?

RH: Yeah. Oh yes. All over.

DM: So where were you...

RH: But I was an engineering officer then.

DM: Yeah.

RH: Which is my role is to maintain the flyability of the planes.

DM: Right.

RH: And...

DM: By that time you guys had Corsairs and...

RH: Oh yes.

DM: ...good equipment coming out.

RH: We had Corsairs by that time.

DM: Now, where were you when the war ended?

RH: When the war ended I was at Cherry Point, North Carolina. I was a plant engineer there at the ONR.

DM: Uh-huh.

RH: And there, and then I got appointed to flight training. I passed all the exams. Everybody wanted me to become a pilot. (Laughs)

DM: Right.

RH: So I spent a year and a half—see, the war ended in '45.

DM: Right.

RH: In '46 I went to flight training.

DM: Right.

RH: I got down to Texas, down at Fort, down at Corpus Christi. And they didn't give a darn whether we got through flight training or not 'cause the war was over.

DM: Right.

RH: And here I was a first lieutenant, so after a year and a half of that kind of hockey puck, I says, no way, I'm getting out of this. So then it was nothing against your record just to drop out of flight training.

DM: Right.

RH: So then I came back to El Toro.

DM: And that's where you finished your career?

RH: Well, yes. I was at the LTA, the helicopter base.

DM: Right.

RH: Actually I retired as a major at Camp Pendleton.

DM: Uh-huh.

RH: And with the First Pioneer Battalion.

DM: I'll be darned. And that was after how many years of service?

RH: Twenty-one, almost twenty-one years.

DM: Incredible.

RH: Yeah, I went in in '38 and retired in [fifty]-eight, but that was later in the year.

DM: So you had a long and distinguished career.

RH: Well, I enjoyed it and I can only thank the Marine Corps for a good career. It's too bad so much of it had to be spent in the war time, but (chuckles)...

DM: Well, that's what you guys were trained for, right.

RH: Yeah. And in peacetime, of course, the service is just like any other job. You've got to apply yourself and try to do the best you can and...

DM: I hazard...go ahead.

RH: We all have a role to play, you know, in that and we were, you know, training the engineers, it was all to support _____ . We went on maneuvers. I'd go out as a

brigade engineer, where we'd build revetments and land equipment on the beach and all that.

DM: This organization, the Pearl Harbor Survivors, that's been pretty important to you.

RH: Yes, it has.

DM: What has that done for you, in your...

RH: Well, it has certainly had a role in keeping the very intent of the organization alive. In other words, let us not forget what happened to us at Pearl Harbor. And let it never happen again. I don't know of any other organization that is even attempting to create this kind of atmosphere. And as time goes by, we all know that, you know, the level of knowledge is going to drop, drop, drop and pretty soon you've got people now even that come up and ask me, "Well, what was Pearl Harbor?"

You know. You know, what happened? We had, when we were at the big celebration on the fiftieth, we were downtown in Honolulu and there was some Japanese tourists there. And they come up and they says, "What is all this celebration about?"

They spoke English. And I says, "Well, this is when the Japanese attacked us here and gave us a chance to..." and they looked at us so strangely, you know.

They didn't even know about it. It's not, it wasn't a part of their history.

DM: So what I would suspect then, Ruben, is that the USS *Arizona* Memorial will serve a vital role.

RH: It definitely will. And everybody that has been to the memorial has been ecstatic about it. It's the way it's presented and the feeling they have when they get there, the emotions they go through. It's very, very, very important.

DM: Well, I'd like to thank you for this interview and it's good to see you again.

RH: Yeah, certainly.

DM: And thank you for shedding some more light on what happened out at Ewa Marine Corps Air Station.

RH: Well, I'm happy to do it and it's just unfortunate you don't have more specific details that you can elaborate on, you know.

DM: But your details added to other people's details create a story.

RH: Well, right.

DM: Thank you very much.

RH: You betcha.

DM: Let me get your mike...

END OF INTERVIEW